

UBER ORGAN (body of life)

(text version 1.30)

Video

30 min 2003

Peer Bode

UBER ORGAN (body of life), emergent selves, electronic opera, document series ...

Notebooks - machines of production, spaces of thinking, diagrammatic universes, future machine, blocs of ages, epochs ...

Harald Bode developed his work within the traditions of mathematics, physics, philosophy, music ... electronics ... like rocks, like apple pie (streudel) ... Weimar kids...

European classical music traditions, pipe organ music, choral traditions ... the virtual voices, vocal modes ... Dreams of Genesis with a vocoder... Harald's father, Max, was a composer, church pipe organist and music teacher. Max's sister studied piano with Franz Liszt. Harald and his new family left Germany in 1954 for America.

Using one hand built experimental instrument, the digital video frame buffer designed by David Jones, built with Peer Bode, to look at the electronic instruments of Harald Bode, from son to father, invagination, not the mythical theater of Oedipal anxieties, but the father, more positive and productive.

My father, Harald Bode (1909-1986), made and had many organs, Warbo, Melochord, Melodium, Polychord, the Bode organ: UBER ORGAN ... he also had a body without organs ... Ring Modulator, Frequency Shifter, Vocoder, BarberPole Phaser ... The electronic music historian Tom Rhea informed me that Harald Bode was also the father (and mother) of the first modular audio synthesizer. My sense is that makes that system another brother or sister of mine, my mother Irmgard's other child, a member of the family, a cyborg relative of sorts, molecular, machinic, an open ended becoming machine

Real time digital reprocessing, hand built digital video buffer designed by David Jones, built with Peer Bode. Life moves forward and back, so does my digital video frame buffer. 48 frames under computer control and constantly there is a feeding of new digital video into the memory chamber. We see live and stored micro epochs, jumping forward and back in time, performing durations, vibrations, resonances, ... electronic cinematics.

The video UBER ORGAN is an assemblage of several contingent elements:

1948 - Melodium sound recording, North German Radio, Hamburg, Germany.

1972 - b+w 1/2" video portapack recordings made by my brother Ralf D. Bode, his wife then Lenore Bode and myself interviewing Harald Bode.

1998 - digitally reprocessed recordings of the interviews and Harald Bode's notebooks of 1937 to 1977 at the Experimental Television Center in Owego, NY.

2002 - non linear editing performance, Institute for Electronic Arts, Alfred, NY and PEP Studios Rochester, NY

Experimentation ... machinic, material opera.

My father, Harald Bode, kept notebooks for nearly 50 years. In those notebooks he collected his thoughts and made designs and plans for the electronic music instruments he would build from 1937 to 1986.

From 1979 to the present, together with electronic wizard and designer David Jones and prodings and vision from electronic artist and legend Ralph Hocking, who taught me about the ethics of experimentation, I built and worked with the digital video frame buffer FB-1 to make my new media work. Woody and Steina Vasulka together with Walter Wright and Jeffry Schierhave been making work for years using their personally built and wonderful Digital Image Articulator. In 1986 video artist Shigeko Kubota told me that once recorded on video you never die. In 1988 Nam June Paik told me to send my father's studio and archive to Hamburg Germany where Harald was born and raised. It was Hamburg's 800 year anniversary. He said that I probably wouldn't do it and that that would be very German of me. I didn't. In 1998 I videotaped selections of Harald Bode's notebooks and reprocessed them with my digital video buffer system.

The sound, music, video units on UBER ORGAN were made of blocs of sound recordings that Harald Bode made over many years to explore and demonstrate the capabilities of his new instruments. Andrew Deutsch made wonderful loops and reconstructions of a number of these recordings. Steina Vasulka plays her violin through the Bode Vocoder in Harald's studio. Pamela Susan Hawkins plays her home made single stringed instrument that she has used to control video. I altered, chopped and shifted the interview sounds using L. H. Lowngrad's Amiga Harmonizer program. Collaborations in the Carrier Band with Pauline Oliveros, Andrew Deutsch, and myself brought Pauline's "Deep Listening" focus to reactivating Harald's sounds. I think of the sound players on the UBER ORGAN video as the virtual UBER ORGAN BAND.

Video tape images of the Bode family were shot in 1972 by my brother, New York and Hollywood cinematographer, Ralf D. Bode as well as Lenore Bode, the first female union D.P. in NYC and myself. Ralf and Lenore started with the plan to shoot with a 16mm Ariflex film camera and Nagra sound tape recorder. With the help of my old school friend Lee Belgard I borrowed a brand new, at that time, Sony 1/2" b+w portapack from the University of Buffalo student media center (thank you Gerald OGrady). The interviews from that moment on were shot on video. Recordings were made for several days to document the family, including my mother Irmgard and young grandson Paul. It became clear as the materials gathered that the video recordings could become the basis for a possible future documentary on Harald and his work. It was also Ralf's introduction to what became many years of his successful film making career making big budget films with the strategic assistance of personal video tools.

UBER ORGAN (body of life) is an image and sound performance piece which premiered at the 2002 exhibition " Signals from the Electronic Cloud" at the Birchfield Penny Art Center in Buffalo, NY. The Birchfield Penny also presented work by electronic music instrument designer Bob Moog in 2001 and a retrospective of the work of film artist Paul Sharrits in 2000.

Pappi, as I called my father, wanted in his later years, to do a collaboration piece with me. I didn't know how to then. This is a belated gesture to him and to a very good teacher and loved friend. It is also an opportunity through the crossing of life and art to remember and honor my family.

There is a theme that surfaces in all this, of electronic arts and its unique micro and macro time frames, its evolution that is fast as well as decades slow. Harald Bode's Vocoder was a planned project in the late 1930's. It wasn't built until around 1977. The cocoon that kept it going included the notebooks, a strategy of pragmatics, of experimentation with new available and affordable electronic components and systems to make electronic instruments for individuals, having a life, a family, a garden, an eating culture, a music culture etc.

In that context of micro and macro time I also want to acknowledge Sherry Miller and Ralph Hocking for keeping the Experimental Television Center adventure alive all these years. The E.T.C. is THE preeminent real time electronic video processing studio. Without exaggeration it is

one of the most remarkable and unique electronic arts studio and program in the world, one that many contemporary artists and makers have benefited, grown and learned from. It has been our school. It has been the beginning of many things. It IS electronics with heat ... It is Real Time, It is Electronic arts learning, experimentation and great generosity of spirit ... Nam June Paik in his early writings realized and imagined the value of a possible experimental television center. Ralph Hocking materialized it. Ralph Hocking, Sherry Miller, David Jones, myself for a number of years, Hank Rudolph and some very smart funders have been REAL WORLDING the ETC for numerous years. Great real life and art bio-diversity has come out of this electronic cocoon.

After seeing UBER ORGAN I realize there are many artists I could and should acknowledge. On the video I mention quite a few, a short list. Not on that list is the film artist Ken Jacobs, who I am grateful to for many reasons including his opening up a vital space in the cinema where I and others have been able to now electronically roam. I am also grateful to have had the opportunity to read and reread Barbara Kennedy's remarkable book 'Deleuze and Cinema, the Aesthetics of Sensation' while I was in China. I had to go to China to read and absorb her work.

One last thought about technology experimentation. In America, it seems, we have an art culture that has a complex and guilty conscience about new technology development. It is good to remember that not all technologies are driven by military war developments, techno science or market capital systems. There is also a somewhat hidden, a minotarian culture of remarkable individuals and small groups designing and building new technologies for art and imagination. To celebrate this media activity is a responsibility. It is to celebrate those inventors, designers and instrument makers, those electronic subcultures. It is to celebrate their work in culture. It is to celebrate the richness and complexity of living at this time in history, with old and next media technologies, the histories of then and next.

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